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ABSTRACT

This paper describes challenges associated with preparing preservice teachers in the 21st century to accept responsibility for devising and presenting lessons that link reading and writing with multiple sign and symbol systems, such as drama, musical composing, film, visual art, and computer technology. It proposes the portal school concept as a viable approach for providing appropriate experiences for preservice teacher education programs that are consistent with new, expanded visions of literacy. Rather than holding classes on campus and visiting schools occasionally, preservice teachers enrolled in portal school projects meet in public schools for lectures, seminars, and demonstration lessons and for practice teaching. Researchers investigated issues viable in preservice teachers' cases, journals, and lessons; possible issue variations in their cases related to school context; and whether contents of their cases illuminate instructional shortcomings. They examined and categorized 204 teaching cases, 189 journal entries, and 85 observation field notes for eight groups of preservice teachers. Analysis revealed that across three teaching contexts, there were nine difficult issues that teacher education programs and school systems should address. The portal school model offers one viable approach for addressing the challenges of collaboration in school-university partnerships. (Contains 39 references.) (SM)

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The Challenges of Integrating Literacy Learning and the Visual and Communicative Arts: A Portal School Focus

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Abstract

The well-documented evolution of the Portal School Projects (e.g., Gipe & Richards, 1992; Richards & Gipe, 1993; Richards & Gipe, 1994; Richards, Gipe, & Moore, 1995; Richards, Moore, & Gipe, 1996; Gipe & Richards, 1997; Richards & Gipe, 1998) has led to the emergence of a project focus that integrates literacy instruction with the visual and communicative arts. Our current inquiry illuminates the challenges associated with preparing preservice teachers in the twenty-first century to accept responsibility for devising and presenting lessons that link reading and writing with multiple sign and symbol systems, such as drama, musical composing, film, visual art, and computer technology.

The Challenges of Integrating Literacy Learning and the Visual and Communicative Arts: A Portal School Focus

"When I found out we had to do a lot of art for these classes, I experienced anxiety and nervousness because I am not artistically inclined ... I don't care what the National Standards say about integrating the arts with literacy lessons". (preservice teacher's case excerpt)

"Gallas refers to the arts as being transformative. I had never thought about this before ,but now I agree. Many people use the arts as a medium for change. For example, the way a picture is structured may change the way we see things. It makes sense that art is an important tool for teaching ... a great 'language'. Finally, Gallas says that her children will "stretch for her." I think that the best teachers give their students opportunities for stretching and push them to fly higher." (preservice teacher's journal entry excerpt)

"Todd, a preservice teacher is sitting on the floor with Kevin and Jason, two first graders enrolled in our After School Literacy Program. They are talking about how they will share what they have learned about Orca whales at the Literacy Celebration.Todd suggests that they write and perform a play. Jason, who previously has struggled with oral language production, articulately asks if they could make whale stick puppets. Todd agrees and their conversation moves quickly from the construction of a puppet stage to the story features that will be included in their play."(observed lesson, instructor field notes)

Until recently, the term 'literacy' narrowly referred to the ability to read and write (Galda & Cullinan, 1997; Messaris, 1997). Now, there is increasing momentum among scholars and in published National and State Standards for Literacy and Arts instruction to consider literacy as multi-literacies composed of multiple sign systems. However, many literacy teacher education programs have not yet begun to offer experiences that will help preservice teachers develop proficiencies in teaching literacy through the visual and communicative arts (see Flood, Heath, & Lapp, 1997; Greene, 1991). We propose the portal school concept as a viable approach for providing appropriate experiences for

preservice teacher education programs that are consistent with new, expanded visions of literacy.

The Portal School Concept

The portal school concept (Del Grande, 1973) provides the foundation for our Portal School Project model for teacher education. As long time literacy teacher educators, we believe that one learns to teach by teaching and carefully studying the effects of that teaching. We also believe that effective teachers are knowledgeable about the subjects they teach. Therefore, we agree with Lee Shulman (1992) that teachers must develop pedagogical as well as content knowledge. Preservice teachers cannot acquire expertise in pedagogy (i.e., the art of teaching) and knowledge of specific content (e.g., reading and language arts) simply by attending classes at a university. To become reflective and skilled practitioners, preservice teachers must work with students in authentic school settings prior to student teaching with their university professors serving as mentors and guides.

Rather than hold classes on campus and visit schools occasionally to practice teaching a few lessons, preservice teachers enrolled in our Portal School Projects meet in elementary schools for lectures, seminars, and demonstration lessons and for practice teaching. Our weekly schedules vary according to our individual teaching contexts and university structures. For example, in two of our three university programs, preservice teachers meet two days per week for three hours each day during an entire semester (six hours per week for six credit hours).

Approximately 30 preservice teachers enroll in these two Portal School Projects every semester and usually ten - eleven classroom teachers at each of the two elementary school sites request to be involved. This means that depending upon class size, individual classroom teachers will receive two - five preservice teachers who will accommodate all of the students in the classroom. For instance if a teacher has 26 students, the teacher will likely receive four preservice teachers, resulting in two groups of six children and two groups of seven children, with one preservice teacher in charge of each group. Preservice teachers work with the same group of students the entire semester, allowing for lesson continuity, the establishment of a cohesive community of learners, and opportunities for preservice teachers to experience the on-going cognitive and academic growth of their elementary students.

In the third context, the Portal School scheme follows a cohort model that allows preservice teachers to work full time while completing their undergraduate program or teacher certification requirements. Preservice teachers (generally 25-30) sign up for a cohort time slot ... either afternoon (1:00-5:00), or evening (5:00-9:00), in elementary schools that are in close proximity to the university campus. Preservice teachers teach small groups of K-5 students for one and 1/2 hours once a week for ten weeks in After School Literacy Programs.

The Evolving Portal School Curricula

The portal school curricula offered at our institutions have evolved considerably over the past twelve years. While the focus has always been on good literacy instruction, the means for assisting the development of preservice teachers viewing themselves as teachers and thinking like professionals has altered significantly. For example, when we began the project we relied on exchanging weekly journal entries with our preservice teachers to promote their reflective thinking. Now, we urge our preservice teachers to construct portfolios and write and share teaching cases to cultivate and track their development as reflective practitioners. We also carefully observe and document our preservice teachers' lessons through extensive field notes. In addition, as the field of literacy has evolved, our course curricula have developed concurrently. We now agree that the term 'literacy' has expanded to represent all endeavors associated with the visual and communicative arts, including examining commercials, texts, and videos thoughtfully and critically; interpreting data on computer web sites and CD-ROM software; visually representing facts and concepts by creating graphs, charts, and murals; and developing aesthetic appreciations and proficiencies. By integrating these unique, multiple communication systems, K-6 students have opportunities to access information, learn, think, solve problems, and express themselves using a full range of sources, including newspapers, television, films, magazines, commercials, videos, music, dance, drama, and the visual arts (see Flood, Heath, & Lapp, 1997).

Support for Our Current Focus

Our current focus is well-supported by a growing number of educational practitioners and scholars. For example, Tompkins states that as we enter the twenty-first century, language arts instruction must broaden "to reflect the greater oral and communication needs [of students]" (1998, p. 23) (also see Alvermann, Moon, & Haygood, 1999; Cairney, 1998; Eisner, 1997; Flood, Heath, & Lapp, 1997; Flood, Lapp, & Wood, 1998; Goldberg, 1997; Piazza, 1999). In addition, the new National Standards for Literacy Instruction (International Reading Association/National Council of Teachers of English, 1996), the 1994 National Standards of Arts Education adopted by 47 states (US Department of Education, Office of Statistics, 1995), and ideas from the Technology and Cognition Group at Vanderbilt University as reported by Reinking (1997), reflect the current transformation and extension of the term literacy beyond reading and writing.

Preservice Teachers Integrating Instruction

Since the visual and communicative arts occupy a central place in forming all aspects of our curriculum, preservice teachers in our reading/language arts field programs integrate literacy instruction with multiple ways of learning, thinking, and knowing at every opportunity. Following ideas from Vygotsky's "Zone of Proximal Development" (1986) the preservice teachers collaborate with their students in presenting student-authored puppet shows, Readers Theatre presentations, and drama productions. They also work side-by-side with their

students, scaffolding, modeling, and creating text-based murals, masks, dances, dioramas, quilts, and songs. For example, a group of first graders wrote and presented a song (to the tune of B-I-N-G-O) based upon their study of Egypt (i.e., E-G-Y-P-T). In addition, as co-constructors of knowledge, along with their students, the preservice teachers compare video and text versions of stories, use e-mail to share interesting concepts they have discovered while reading on-line texts and CD-ROM reports, and author, illustrate, and publish fiction and informational narratives using word processing, drawing, painting, and imaging programs.

Rich Sources of Information

In addition to helping our preservice teachers grow professionally, their participation in writing teaching cases, maintaining journals, and teaching lessons accompanied by instructor-written field notes has served to document the impact of the partnerships from several perspectives. We noted that when viewed as a collection of authentic teaching narratives, the teaching cases, journal entries, and observed lessons accompanied by field notes, offered us considerable insights about the realities of linking students' literacy instruction with aesthetic and technological encounters. Specifically, we discerned that the narratives provided a window into our preservice teachers' planning, thinking, and lived experiences as they undergird their students' reading, writing, and oral language through multiple literacies. More importantly, we recognized that the narratives were grounded in veracity and credibility ... that is, they portrayed real preservice

teachers who work in bona fide elementary schools, offering genuine literacy lessons through a variety of informational formats.

Since there is a paucity of research concerning teaching literacy through the visual and communicative arts (see Flood, Heath, & Lapp, 1997), thinking that we might make a contribution to the literature, we decided to conduct a systematic research project documenting the issues, concerns, and challenges in the narratives (i.e., teaching cases, journal entries, and field notes). We also hoped to expand our understandings about our three nontraditional field programs in which the curricula extend beyond conventional approaches to teaching reading and writing.

Literatures Informing the Inquiry

Our theoretical framework for the study resides in three literatures: 1) case-based pedagogy (J. Shulman, 1992; L. Shulman, 1996; Richards & Gipe, 1999); 2) educational scholars' and practitioners' growing interests and convictions regarding the myriad ways in which literacy learners are now able to access and construct knowledge, connect ideas, and communicate their emotions and thinking (Barnitz & Speaker, 1999; Eisner, 1997; Flood, Heath, & Lapp, 1997); and 3) Howard Gardner's theories of multiple intelligences (1993). We also were guided by ideas concerning the importance of critical reflection for teachers (Zeichner & Liston, 1987). Further, we acknowledge the complexities of preparing preservice teachers in the twenty-first century to appreciate and offer effective reading and

language arts lessons through the integration of the visual and communicative arts.

Research Questions and Methodology

In our qualitative inquiry we sought to answer the following questions:

1) What issues are visible in our preservice teachers' cases journals, and lessons?
2) Are possible issue variations in our preservice teachers' cases related to the contextual conditions of the schools in which they work?
3) Do the contents of our preservice teachers' cases illuminate instructional gaps or shortcomings that we as program supervisors need to remedy?

Data Sources and Mode of Inquiry

Working as a research team, we examined and categorized 204 teaching cases,189 journal entries, and 85 observation field notes for eight groups of preservice teachers who matriculated over the past year through our field programs offered at state universities in south Mississippi, southeast Louisiana, and western Washington.

In subsequent meetings, and through E-mail and telephone, using analytic induction (Bogdan & Biklin, 1992), we read and reread the collection of narratives, looking for emerging categories and patterns that would "facilitate a coherent synthesis of the data" (Gay, 1996, p. 227). We made notes and underlined what we considered to be salient dimensions of the texts as a way of revealing the predominant theme or central issue in each case. Next, we coded and categorized each narrative according to the prevailing issue. We settled any

difference of interpretations through collegial discussions until we reached agreement.

Analysis revealed that across the three teaching contexts, the narratives revealed 9 major issues: 1) concerns about reaching unmotivated students; 2) dilemmas regarding students who were afraid to take risks in the arts and in using computer technology; 3) problems about group management and planning considerations; 4) self-doubts about preservice teachers' abilities to integrate literacy with drama, the visual arts, music, and computer technology; 5) concerns about students' visual arts, drama, and writing initiatives being significantly influenced by high tech films, provocative rock and 'hip-hop' videos and personal experiences with violence; 6) perplexities regarding the significant amount of time needed to organize and integrate multiple communication forms into cohesive literacy lessons; 7) dilemmas caused by a shortage of computer technology equipment available in classrooms; 8) issues revolving around preservice teachers' underdeveloped computer literacy skills; and 9) concerns about communicating to parents exactly what students were learning through the arts. The following narrative excerpts portray two of these issues.

Issue #3 "When I first told my kindergarten students that we would be performing a play they immediately became disruptive and started yelling out what play they wanted to perform and what parts they wanted to take. Well, I got really upset over their behavior so I said, "The next time we meet I will have our drama production typed and I will assign parts to everyone."

At our next session, I announced, "We are going to do a play about Goldilocks and the Three Bears (Brett, 1987). Jonah, you are the Poppa Bear, Margie, you are the Momma Bear, and George, you are the Baby Bear. Salina is Goldilocks and Mercedes is the narrator."

I thought that my prior planning and concrete directions would solve everything, but was I wrong. Jonah said, "I want to be the narrator," and Salina said, "I want to be a bear." So, mass confusion reigned once more until finally we got the parts straightened out.

I knew George would make a great baby bear because I had seen him act in class. He really is quite a performer and he settled down and followed directions. For our practices I brought bears' noses for each of the bears and a blonde wig for Goldilocks. This turned out to be a super idea because it helped the students imagine that they really were the characters. But, everyone in the group except George continued to be divided about their lines and they argued about where they should stand on the stage. Their disruptive behavior continued throughout all of our play practices. We even had a few fights break out because they couldn't keep their hands to themselves. What a mess! When I told them that if they couldn't cooperate, we would all have to go back to the classroom, George shouted, "That's not fair to punish all of us because I didn't do anything!"

I finally went to the library and read Start with a story (Watson-Ellam, 1991). I learned that creating drama productions should bring about a sense of community among participants rather than chaos. I also found out that I shouldn't tell my students what play we will present or assign parts to them. Rather, I need

to discuss drama possibilities with my students, serve as a resource as they create their drama productions, and then, give them choices about what characters they will play. All of this advice sounds great. But, what can a teacher really do to keep order when students are engaging in activities that are not part of their regular, daily routine and that require movement and lots of student talk and interactions?" (one of 37 teaching cases mentioning issues about group management and planning considerations)

Issue #5 It isn't easy offering literacy-based arts activities to older students who have had few opportunities to engage in artistic pursuits. I teach sixth grade boys and most have never made books, pasted, sung in a school chorus, painted, created papier mache sculpture, or participated in drama productions. They love our literacy-based arts experiences, but, they have no idea how to use their own self-expression and creativity. Instead, they fall back on what they see on TV and hear on their boom boxes.

"Dr. Love and Puff Daddy are **COOOL**," David shouted when we were talking about putting on a play.

"Yeah," Anthony responded, "Let's do a play about Dr. Love and Puff Daddy and their wicked ways."

"I don't know who they are," I answered. The idea of putting on a play about rap stars named Dr. Love and Puff Daddy were not on my teaching agenda.

The same thing happened when we painted. The students created terrible looking creatures that they had seen on TV. They also tried to paint really

provocative looking women that looked like the Spice Girls and they got frustrated when they couldn't create animated cars, trains, and animals like they see in high tech films. Well, I finally had to make some rules. "No more TV and rap stuff in our work," I announced. "We need to use our own imaginations and ideas."

I wonder if I am fooling myself? These students are significantly influenced by television, high tech films, and 'hip hop' and rock music as Alvermann, Moon, and Haygood state in their text Popular culture in the classroom: Teaching and researching critical media literacy (1999). How can I counteract what they see and hear daily and consider 'cool'? How can I bring out their own creativity? I can't find any solutions to this problem at all. (one of 35 teaching cases mentioning issues about students' visual arts, drama, and writing initiatives being significantly influenced by high tech films, provocative rock and 'hip-hop' videos and personal experiences with violence)

Issue 9. "In my preschool classroom, literacy experiences were in every section of the room. Students were writing menus and grocery lists in the home center. They were using various types of paper, pens, markers, and crayons in our writing center to write books, letters, and cards. In the literacy corner, they were practicing book sharing routines, developing concepts about stories, and using books to inform and entertain others. In the puppet theater, students were presenting an informal play, and at the sensory table they were practicing writing letters while learning to recognize the alphabet as a special set of written signs. I

only wish I could have explained this to my students' parents as they stood wondering about what their children were learning while they were engrossed in play and the arts. (one of 27 journal entries mentioning issues about communication with parents).

Challenges and Implications for Teacher Education and School System Personnel

Our inquiry illuminates the challenges associated with preparing preservice teachers in the twenty-first century to accept responsibility for devising and presenting lessons that encompass the integration of reading and writing with multiple sign and symbol systems, such as drama, composing, film, art, videos, and computer technology. The content of the preservice teachers' narratives documents similar concerns in all three teaching contexts and reveals nine difficult issues that teacher education programs and school systems may need to address. For instance, in what ways might schools structure their curricula and teachers alter or adjust their practices so that all students are motivated to engage wholeheartedly in the arts? Similarly, what pre-lesson activities might teachers offer to bolster students' willingness to take risks with arts and technological pursuits? Similarly, although many schools already are aware of their shortcomings in computer technology and are working toward more access to technology, they may be overlooking the need for enhanced teacher training in

conjunction with obtaining current, state-of-the-art hardware.

The results of our research also point out specific shortcomings in our teaching that are in our control to remedy. For example, we have too readily assumed that our preservice teachers came to us skilled and knowledgeable about computer software programs and CD-ROM applications. This is not the case and we can take steps to incorporate appropriate software applications in our teaching. We also have presupposed that our preservice teachers were adept in planning multi-modal literacy lessons, competent in managing groups of students, and able to weave and intermingle multiple combinations of the visual and communicative arts into cohesive units of literacy instruction. We neglected to consider a substantial body of research showing that learning to teach takes time and that novice teachers develop through professional stages, moving from concern for self to concern for students (see Fuller, 1969). We must remember to provide activities that serve as scaffolds for our preservice teachers as they learn to teach, and especially teach in ways that are generally foreign to what they experienced as elementary students themselves. In addition, we need to present our innovative course curricula gradually to our preservice teachers, giving them opportunities to explore and embrace new expanded views of literacy. As Jane Remer (1996) reminds us, when learning to integrate the arts in their teaching,

teachers can begin moderately by teaching *with* the arts, adding daily routines or centers; then *about* and *in* the arts, to finally *through* the arts, where the arts are both learning tools and unit centers.

Implications of our inquiry emphasize the need for teacher preparation programs to acknowledge the new, expanded twenty-first century paradigm of literacy by offering whole programs, not just one or two field-based courses that address multiple forms of literacy. Essential knowledge relevant to such programs include cutting-edge brain research (Jensen, 1998), multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983), life stages (Erickson, 1950), developmental stages (Piaget, 1950), hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1970), and social development (Vygotsky, 1986). But, teacher education programs alone cannot provide all that is needed. The most effective teacher education programs will be developed in partnership with schools. The Portal School Model offers one viable approach for addressing the challenges of the collaboration process in school/university partnerships.

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